

HEART COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: for the meeting of March 15, 2017

Committee Members Present:

Michele Giarusso, Chair	Alan Genovese	Ginger Robinson
Tracy Rogers, Secretary	Dawn Magi	Bill Wahlstrom
Joseph Arsenault	Jack Killeen	
Sharon Fontaine	Tony Matteo	
Richard Fontaine	Sue O'Reilly McRae	

Others Present:

None.

The meeting was called to order at 6:38 p.m.

Michele spoke with Debbie Lynangale, the Committee's facilitator, about how the Committee will make decisions. Debbie feels it's a development of recommendations, rather than decisions. To go by something like Robert's Rules inhibits brainstorming. She suggested we try a few meetings without Robert's Rules. Michele referred to a handout on the Problem Solving Cycle, which is one example of another way to conduct our meetings. We could also use brainstorming and other methods to conduct discussion, but use Robert's Rules to make decisions after discussion is completed.

Since the Committee has decided to meet more frequently than the grant funding paying for Debbie's services will support, Debbie suggested we use the funding for her to meet with chair prior to meetings and to facilitate two HEART meetings per month. We could also alternate sessions so she comes to one meeting per month. We'd hold the second meeting without her, which would involve members gathering information that she would help us discuss during the following meeting. A third option is to use Debbie to focus on external facilitation with focus groups and discussions with teachers, staff, community members, etc.

Tracy asked if the Committee should restrict its use of facilitation because of the amount of grant funds, or if towns could contribute to have Debbie for more hours. Michele reported that Leyden has discussed financially supporting facilitation and Ginger reported that Representative Mark has offered to help us with funding.

Ginger reported that a few people from Bernardston and Leyden met with Representative Mark on Monday. Superintendent Buoniconti had mentioned the idea of getting a grant from the State to problem-solve cost-sharing between districts, etc. Representative Mark was very enthusiastic about that idea and the work the HEART Committee is embarking on in general and indicated that he thinks he could get us funds to continue our work, but he needs a figure by April 13th in order to get it into the FY18 budget. The Committee felt it would look favorable in a grant application if Pioneer, Mohawk, and a third school district applied together. There was some discussion about whether the HEART Committee is ready to partner with other districts yet. Members decided to table further discussion until we have our own goals clearly stated.

The Committee will use the March 29th meeting, where Debbie will be able to join us, to agree on her role. The April 12th meeting will focus on making initial agreements about the Committee's goals and outcomes, determining what structures will be necessary, and a timeline.

Minutes

Jack moved to approve minutes from the March 1, 2017 meeting as written. The motion was seconded by Dawn and carried by a unanimous vote.

Ground Rules

Michele shared a list of ground rules she thought the Committee might want to adopt for its discussions and asked if anyone had items to add to the list. The Committee agreed to add two items:

1. Be on time and be prepared.
2. No decision will be made the same night as the topic is discussed (so as to give members time to fully consider items and talk with community members before making decisions).
3. If a member missing three consecutive meetings, someone will check in with them to see if they're still interested in serving.

Committee Membership

The Committee discussed adding diversity to its membership by recruiting more teachers, staff, parents, and community members onto the Committee. Not many community members know about the Committee's existence yet. Tony suggested that perhaps the Northfield representatives should have a booth at the upcoming spaghetti dinner at the Elementary School. Joe suggested putting something in the Bernardston Elementary School newsletter.

A lot of discussion took place about Committee membership. How large should the Committee be? Can we involve others through subcommittees or inviting them in for specific topic areas? Perhaps Debbie could facilitate monthly focus groups and the Committee could meet on its own on the opposite weeks. We could reserve special time slots in the meetings to discuss certain topics, so outside members could come for short periods of time to join the discussion if they don't want to come for the full meeting.

There seemed to be some confusion between the Committee and the superintendent about whether teachers were invited to participate on the Committee. Sharon will tell the teachers' union leader that we would like one teacher from each elementary school, one from the middle school, and one from the high school. They don't have to come to every meeting, but if they can at least come on the nights Debbie is there to facilitate, we'd really like to have them involved. It was also suggested that teachers could discuss the Committee's progress during their monthly staff meetings and report back to HEART what feedback they received.

Members agreed to reach out to teachers in their respective towns to keep them informed and to parents. We should make it clear that the meetings are open meetings, so more than formal members are invited to attend.

Possible Mission/Goals

The Committee started brainstorming a list of mission and goal items:

- Ways to reduce expenses while keeping standards up
- Other ways to utilize staff instead of just keeping them on because we don't want to lay them off
- More use of technology to reduce the number of teachers
- Play to children's different strengths
- Online learning
- Shared staff

- Teacher:student ratio
- Make people from Leyden comfortable about coming to Bernardston if they so choose
- Get clout with legislature and governor.
- Can't have town versus school anymore. Need to be partners.
- We should have presentations on budget drivers so we can understand the District's point of view, such as having the special ed director present on SPED costs; someone discussing the costs of insurance; someone to explain the reduction in state aid.
- Lobby State for money for transportation funds
- Economic growth, jobs, broadband
- Get feedback from as many people as possible, including bus drivers, janitors, teachers' aides, and admin staff.
- We could offer a \$500 reward for suggestions that get implemented.
- Look into energy use and efficiency, including how the District Agreement hinders energy improvements. Implementing energy efficiencies could be a teaching opportunity for the kids.
- Look into collaborating with the virtual school in Greenfield, rather than reinventing technological solutions.
- Should we have our own website? If we do, we could make it easy for people to submit anonymous suggestions. We could also use online surveys to get more feedback. We do need to keep in mind, however, that not everyone has broadband, so we'll need to have multiple ways to reach out.
- School choice and charter
- Look at revenues as well as expenses
- Explore becoming a magnet school. Make our schools more enticing so we stop losing students. Ask parents why they send their children elsewhere.
- Keep our children in town as adults and have their children attend our schools.
- Enrollment and its connection to broadband and cell service
- School admin costs and structure and possibly sharing work with other districts such as payroll or a shared superintendent

Meeting Dates/Times

The Committee agreed that meetings will be no longer in length than two hours. A discussion on future meeting locations was tabled.

Adjournment

Jack moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:25 p.m. Dawn seconded the motion and it was carried by a unanimous vote.

NEXT MEETING: March 29, 6:30 p.m. at the Bernardston Senior Center, 20 Church St.

HOMEWORK: None.

Respectfully submitted,



Tracy Rogers